

Eighteen year old Andrew Sznajder of Toronto is one of Canada's brightest young tennis prospects. He is currently preparing to compete in the Corel North American Tennis Championships being held at Varsity Arena starting Feb. 3rd. Excalibur sports editor Deborah Kirkwood spoke to him about his upcoming decision to either turn professional or accept a tennis scholarship in the US.

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## SPORTS FEATURE



# Academics versus a Pro Career

The athletes who currently train at the National Tennis Centre here at York University have made their choice. But just how does one decide?

**Q.** How long have you played competitive tennis?

**A.** Well, on the pro circuit, about 3 months, competitively overall, approximately five years.

**Q.** What was your final junior world ranking?

**A.** I can't answer that one exactly, but when I played the European tour I think I was in the top 15 in singles and top 10 in doubles.

**Q.** What is your current world ranking on the ATP/WTA computer? I think I recently read that you were ranked around 339, is that number up to date?

**A.** Yes, that's correct. I have just recently finished playing Texas and Hawaii. Before those two tournaments started I was ranked 807 in the world, so that's a pretty big jump.

**Q.** Are you grateful for the level of education you have received thus far? Or do you think it might have been better for you to quit school like Borg at grade nine?

**A.** I have my grade 12 diploma already, so I can go to any university in the United States right now. But I decided to go on the circuit for a year and I'm doing alright. But I'm also in between because I'm studying correspondence courses as well. So I'm happy with what I've done thus far.

**Q.** At what age did you stop playing junior tennis in Canada?

**A.** At the age of 17. That was the last time I played junior tennis in Canada. I played internationally in tournaments after that, but not in Canada.

**Q.** At what age did you feel you could make a career from tennis?

**A.** I still don't know if I can make a career out of it (laugh), but I'll find out soon. What I've decided to do, is to give myself until September 1986 to break the top 150 or 100 in the world if possible. And once I do that, I probably can make a career out of it. But if I don't do that, there's probably a better chance maybe for me to get an education. I'll see how it goes. I'm keeping my amateur status right now, I'm not accepting any prize money so I can get a nice scholarship somewhere.

**Q.** You're not accepting any money at all or is it being put in a trust?

**A.** It goes into a trust, the cheques are not in my name.

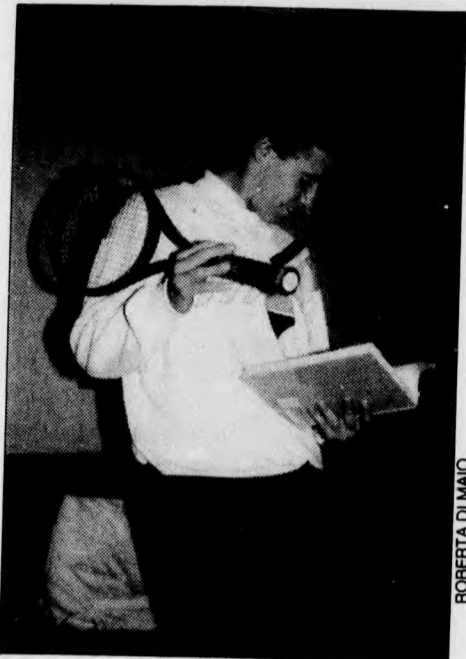
**Q.** You said earlier that you have set a goal of being in the top 150 or 100 in the world by September 1986. Do you think it is wise to set a deadline like that. I mean if you don't achieve it, won't it hurt you psychologically?

**A.** I don't think so, because when I set my goals I set them pretty high. First of all my overall goal is to get into the top 50. But, it all depends if I can keep my head straight, and if I can do that and think logically on the court, than I have a chance of breaking the top 100. Also (pause), when I set them (my goals) high, it makes me work harder, and then I usually get there. When I was playing juniors at around 13 or 14, my goal was to be number one in each age division, and that's exactly what happened. I was number one under 14, under 16, and under 18. So maybe I can achieve this one.

**Q.** If you go to University, do you know right now what you would like to do?

**A.** I would like to go into dentistry. Take pre dentistry at first and then follow up from that.

**Q.** Are you facing a lot of pressure from family, friends, coaches to quit school? And if so, how are you handling it?



ROBERTA DI MAIO

Pro tennis or scholarship, Sznajder must decide, and below in action.

**A.** No, I'm not feeling any kind of pressure right now. Well, the way my parents approach it is that they let me make my own decisions and then when I do, they then give their opinion like maybe it's right or wrong, and suggest that this is what you might want to do instead. I might also go up to some of my friends and say listen, what do you think of this decision and they'll give me their opinion. When I get the information from all around, I then just go to my room or another quiet place and think about it.

**Q.** Could you continue to play tennis at the level you are now without a scholarship?

**A.** Well, I can't answer that. I think if you have a chance, you should go out and play the pro circuit for a year because, you don't lose anything. Once you get your grade 12, you can take a year off and then go back. However, once you take two years off, then you're in a bit of trouble if you don't have anything to back you up.

**Q.** Has the experience of friends influenced your decision process?

**A.** Well, my friends are quite encourag-

ing. I mean, when I lose they say "let's go out and forget about it." This helps to get a different perspective on things in the morning. They'll say "listen, we know you played a stupid match, you made dumb errors, and you messed up. But tomorrow's another day, so you just go out and work hard. Improve on the mistakes that you made and don't do them again." Also, when I'm on the court, my friends go bananas, they cheer and they yell, it's great. And that pushes you to go harder, and they believe in you so it's hard to say, no, I'm not going to do this anymore.

**Q.** What do you think being Canadian at a predominately American institution will be like? I know some people who have had problems?

**A.** I don't think there would be any problems. As a matter of fact, the schools have contacted me, I didn't have to do any poking around. It has been kind of a surprise to me. For instance when I was in Hawaii, Stanford University called me up and asked if I was interested in going to their school. And then the University of Miami, Arkansas, and Arizona also called. Therefore, I'm sort of in a good position. I explained to them that I was going on the pro circuit until September. If I do great, then I'll stay on it. If I don't, I'll stay in touch with the schools. I phone them up, tell them what I am doing, where I am in the rankings, and they give me encouragement. And when they're in the they even come down to watch. I mean it's really nice to have people around that will give you a hand when you need it.

**Q.** Is there any school that you are leaning towards right now?

**A.** Yes Miami (laugh), nice warm Miami.

**Q.** Why that school?

**A.** Well, I have close family there. I mean they act like my second family when I'm down there. I like the coach there and it's warm. I would also like to go someplace where I can practice all year round outdoors, and not have to go to indoor facilities in the snow and all. But I'm not in a position to decide right now. I've got

these tournaments to play and I should worry about those. I mean, I've sort of secured myself right now, because I can go either way.

All the schools are good. They all have great tennis programs, good academics, and the weather is appropriate. As far as I'm concerned, that's going to be the hardest decision, to pick one.

**Q.** You sound like you would be somewhat serious about your studies if you decided to take a scholarship. What would happen if a coach said, look Andrew, I think you should concentrate a little more on the tennis and less on the school. How would you handle it, because that's one of the major criticisms of the American scholarship scene.

**A.** I think I would just walk away from it. I mean, I don't think a coach would tell you to do that. But then again, I guess it all depends on the school and what level the coach or teacher is at. Because if you go to a pretty prestigious school, shall we say, I mean they require 100% school and 50% tennis. And if you go to a school like Stanford, they expect 100% school and 100% tennis (laugh). It's simple, if you get bad marks you're out of there. I've talked to all the coaches and they've said, look, you get average school marks and great results on the tennis court, stick to what you are doing.

**Q.** The recent slide of junior phenoms like Arron Krickstein and Jimmy Arias have caused people to question whether tennis players in general, are physically and psychologically mature enough at 16 or 18 to handle the tour. Do you think you have that level of maturity now, or do you think three or four years of school might help that?

**A.** First, I would say that any person that hits the pro tour is a little bit unprepared. Where I stand now, I've adapted quite well to the satellite circuit, but tournaments that's a whole different ball game. When you play the satellite circuit you stay in one country for five weeks and that's it. In tournaments you have to go to different countries each week and through different time zones, and that's tough. You only get one day to travel. That means if you get to the finals every week (the tournament ends on Sunday) you have to get to the next tournament Monday. And this can go on for three months or more. In that way I can see why it may cause people some problems. To answer your question now, physically, I think I'm ready for it, but there's always room for improvement. But emotionally, well I don't know about that just yet.

**Q.** Do you think by accepting a sports scholarship that you are saying, my chance at a professional tennis career is over, or are you saying I'm going to take the three or four years and hope I improve and then give it another shot?

**A.** Well, that's a tough question. I think if I take a scholarship I'd be saying to myself that I'm just going to school again. I think school teaches you to think logically and to use common sense. Therefore the way I think of it, it (school) can only be a benefit to me. After 3 or 4 years at school I'll hopefully become a better player, a better individual, and then I'll go out on the circuit again.

College is like another life. It's not like high school or junior school, it's totally different. You're on your own and you meet new people. People are nice to you, and they help you out. I think in that way school will be a benefit to me.

The semester system in the US is also a benefit because I have been told you can take up to 4 months off. So you have the best of both worlds. You get your college tennis in, you get your education in, and you can play all the tournaments you want as well. But, I'll be making my decision nine months from now.

